

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Commodity Credit Corporation

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Wetlands Reserve Program

**AGENCY:** Commodity Credit Corporation, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Department of Agriculture (USDA).

**ACTION:** Notice of Request for Proposals (RFP).

**SUMMARY:** The Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program (WREP) is administered under the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) and uses existing authority to enhance the delivery of WRP. Specifically, WREP provides an avenue for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to form special partnerships with others to improve or expand the delivery of WRP, including, but not limited to, easement acquisition and activities associated with wetland restoration, creation, or enhancement. Additionally, NRCS may use WREP to obtain assistance with easement management activities from those who have the appropriate expertise, as determined by the Chief of NRCS.

For Federal fiscal year (FY) 2005, NRCS, on behalf of the Commodity Credit Corporation, is making \$4,045,000 million in financial assistance available for WREP partnership proposals: 1) that address wetland creation and enhancement efforts on easements enrolled in prior years; 2) where partners will contribute significantly to WRP technical assistance costs; and 3) that provide assistance with managing easement projects. Of the \$4,045,000 million available, \$500,000 shall be available for partnership proposals that address Bog Turtle habitat in the east, and \$500,000 shall be available for partnership proposals that address Ivory-Billed Woodpecker habitat in Arkansas. NRCS estimates the reserved funds,

along with contributions from partners, which may result in addressing wetland restoration, creation, enhancement, and easement management on approximately 5,000 acres.

**DATES:** Proposals must be received in the NRCS State office by June 30, 2005.

**ADDRESSES:** Written proposals must be sent to the appropriate NRCS State Conservationist, USDA. The telephone numbers and addresses of the NRCS State Conservationists are in the appendix of this notice.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, CONTACT:** Leslie Deavers, National WRP Program Manager, Natural Resources Conservation Service, 14<sup>th</sup> and Independence Avenue, S.W., Room 0110A-S, Washington, D.C. 20250; telephone: (202) 720-1062; facsimile: (202) 720-6697; e-mail: [leslie.deavers@usda.gov](mailto:leslie.deavers@usda.gov); Subject: Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program RFP; or consult the NRCS Web site at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/farmland/2002>.

CATALOG OF FEDERAL DOMESTIC ASSISTANCE (CFDA) NUMBER: 10.072.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**

I. Funding Opportunity Description

A. Background

The Secretary of Agriculture delegated to NRCS the authority to administer WRP in 1994 as part of Department Reorganization. NRCS has made significant use of partners for the various phases of program delivery, but these partnership arrangements were marketed within the context of WRP and did not carry a unique label.

The Chief, NRCS, supports developing competitive processes that direct funding to projects that achieve maximum environmental benefits while remaining cost-effective.

Therefore, the Agency is providing an opportunity for those interested in wetland restoration and

protection to compete for funding for partnership efforts that are determined mutually desirable by the NRCS State Conservationist and the potential partner.

NRCS initiated the Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program (WREP) pilot effort in FY 2004 by authorizing a WREP project area in Nebraska and multiple areas in Minnesota. The Nebraska WREP focuses on the Lower Missouri River. The Minnesota WREP focuses on wetland and associated upland restorations in the Grand Marais and Buffalo River watersheds in northwest Minnesota, a corridor of restoration along the main stem of the Red River of the North, and the Presidential-declared disaster counties of Dodge, Faribault, Freeborn, Mower, and Steele in southern Minnesota. For the selected WREP project areas, partners are contributing both financial and technical assistance.

WREP does not alter the nature of WRP. The emphasis of WREP is restoring and protecting habitat for migratory birds and other wetland-dependent wildlife. Landowners will continue to have the opportunity to enroll land under permanent easement, 30-year easement, or restoration cost-share agreements. However, a WREP proposal may provide for emphasizing one enrollment type or another, such as increasing the utilization of 30-year WRP easements in a particular watershed by the partner purchasing a permanent easement overlay to the 30-year WRP easement and the landowner receiving full compensation from the combined acquisition. Additionally, wetland restoration, creation, and enhancement actions will continue to be designed to maximize wildlife habitat according to the WRP regulation, 7 CFR Part 1467, and NRCS standards and specifications. Proposals related to easement management must conform to the WRP guidelines for managing lands subject to a WRP easement.

NRCS is interested in expanding the WREP implementation effort, and is therefore making the opportunity to participate in WREP available nationwide.

## B. Availability of Funding

Effective on the publication date of this notice, NRCS announces the availability of up to \$4,045,000 million in financial assistance, for WREP activities, until September 30, 2005. Of the \$4,045,000 million available, \$500,000 in financial assistance is reserved for proposals associated with Bog Turtle habitat restoration in the east, and \$500,000 is reserved for Ivory-Billed Woodpecker habitat in Arkansas.

In making its selections, NRCS will emphasize proposals that provide for significant levels of technical assistance provided by a partner. The proposals may address WRP delivery; wetland restoration, creation, and enhancement activities; easement management; or a combination of these activities. In addition, proposals that address Bog Turtle habitat restoration and protection may also be submitted. Bog Turtle proposals will compete only with other Bog Turtle proposals, and are limited to the \$500,000 reserved for such projects. Proposals that address the Ivory-Billed Woodpecker habitat will be handled in the same manner.

Proposals shall be submitted to the applicable NRCS State Conservationist by [Insert date 45 days after date of publication in grants.gov]. The NRCS State Conservationist will prioritize proposals, with input from the State Technical Committee and the factors according to this Notice. If more than two proposals are received by the State Conservationist, the top two priority proposals will be submitted to the Chief, NRCS, for consideration. Funds will be awarded through a nationwide competitive process. NRCS will select proposals based on the criteria established in this Notice. For a proposal to be considered, it must provide non-Federal funding for at least 50 percent of the project's technical assistance cost. Technical assistance contributions may be in the form of in-kind contributions.

## C. Overview of the Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program

In FY 2005, the purpose of WREP is to stimulate the development of partnerships that serve to lower Agency program delivery costs. NRCS will accept proposals for single- or multi-year projects, not to exceed 3 years, from eligible entities including federally-recognized Indian tribes, State and local governments, and non-governmental organizations and individuals. Proposals for longer durations will receive a higher priority than those for short-term durations. Likewise, proposals where a partner with the necessary expertise, as determined by NRCS, is contributing the majority of the technical assistance to meet the objectives of the partnership will receive higher priority.

Proposals are solicited for multiple-program operations, including administration related to easement acquisition assistance in locations serving Bog Turtle habitat and Ivory-Billed Woodpecker habitat, wetland creation and enhancement on projects enrolled in WRP prior to FY 2005, easement management, and proposals that provide for technical assistance contributions from partners. Proposals are accepted from all 50 States, the Caribbean Area (Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands), and the Pacific Basin Area (Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands).

NRCS State Conservationists will submit the top two priority proposals based on State resource concerns and technical resource needs. Submissions to NRCS' National Headquarters must be accompanied by a letter of recommendation from the appropriate NRCS State Conservationist(s). Complete proposals will be evaluated by a review board, established by the Chief, NRCS, which includes the following Agency personnel: representatives from the Easement Programs Division, Ecological Sciences Division, and the Resource Inventory and Analysis Division. Proposals will be scored based on the Criteria for Proposal Evaluation identified in this RFP. Scored proposals will be forwarded to the Chief, NRCS, with

recommendations for project approval. The Chief, NRCS, will announce the selected proposals. Those selected to participate in WREP will enter into an agreement with the NRCS State Conservationist that specifies the schedule, budget, and related requirements for utilization of WREP funds. The State Conservationist will be signatory to the WREP contribution agreement on behalf of NRCS.

## II. Definitions

In addition to the definitions found in 7 CFR Part 1467 pertaining to the Wetlands Reserve Program, the following definitions shall be applicable to this Notice:

Contribution agreement means the legal instrument entered into under the authority of 7 U.S.C. 6962a.

Cooperative agreement means the same as that term is defined in the Federal Grants and Cooperative Agreement Act, 31 U.S.C. 6301 et seq.

Project management means taking certain action to ensure that full wetland functions and values, as required by the WRP easement, are achieved and maintained, as well as conducting certain administrative actions to ensure that the integrity of the easement is maintained.

Wetland creation means the establishment of wetland conditions through the manipulation of the physical, chemical, or biological characteristics present to develop a wetland that did not previously exist on an upland or deepwater site.

Wetland enhancement means the manipulation of the physical, chemical, or biological characteristics of a wetland site to heighten, intensify, and improve specific function(s), or to change the growth stage or composition of the vegetation.

## III. Proposal Requirements

For a proposal to be considered, it must include the following:

A. A description of how the WREP proposal enhances the Agency's efforts to either create or enhance wetlands on projects enrolled in prior years, considering the Agency's goal to maximize wetland functions and values and emphasizing habitat for migratory birds and other wetland dependent species. For proposals that address Bog Turtle habitat and the Ivory-Billed Woodpecker habitat, the description shall be expanded to address wetland restoration and protection efforts, as applicable.

B. A thorough description of how WREP will be implemented with a schedule for implementation, along with the location and size of project area, and the following:

1. For proposals related to administrative program delivery activities, include the specific tasks to be performed by the partner and the Agency, as well as the scope of the proposal in terms of acres and contracts that will be addressed

2. For proposals related to creation and enhancement activities, include information on the credentials for those who will be contributing technical resources and the types of creation and enhancement activities that will be performed. Identify whether there is a target species or habitat. Include a schedule for implementation.

3. For proposals to manage WRP-enrolled easement acres, include the number of projects and acres to be managed, information about the management strategy for the targeted habitat, and the credentials related to wetland habitat management for those identified to perform the work.

C. A description of anticipated staffing needs and a detailed description regarding partner contributions. Identify both technical and financial resources that will be provided by each partner. Give a detailed description of how the project will be organized and managed. Include a list of key project personnel, their relevant education or experience, and their

anticipated contributions to the project. Explain the level of participation required in the project by government and non-government entities. Identify who will participate in monitoring and evaluating the project.

D. Set forth a schedule of requested WRP funding needs on an annual basis and for the life of the agreement.

E. For proposals related to Bog Turtle or Ivory-Billed Woodpecker habitat restoration and protection, include a description of the types of conservation practices anticipated being used, information regarding whether emphasis will be made relative to the proximity of projects to other protected areas, information related to the knowledge and expertise of those providing technical assistance, anticipated number of acres to be restored and protected, and whether the proposal focuses on habitat restoration through cost-share agreements, easements, or both.

## VI. Criteria for Proposal Evaluation

### A. State Level Criteria

1. All proposals related to Bog Turtle and Ivory-Billed Woodpecker habitat restoration and protection shall be forwarded by the State Conservationists to the Chief, NRCS, for consideration. All other proposals will be evaluated based on the determination of the NRCS State Conservationist, with input from the State Technical Committee, that:

- a. Acceptance of the proposal will accomplish a WRP activity that otherwise would not be accomplished given the State WRP technical assistance allocation in FY 2005. For example, the proposal would enable the State to create and enhance more acres in FY 2006 than would otherwise be addressed; the proposal would expedite WRP easement closings by several months; or necessary management activities under WRP would not take place but for the acceptance of the proposal.



- b. The potential partner has the necessary technical expertise and resources to perform the tasks identified in the proposal.
  - c. The potential partner(s) are contributing 50 percent or more of the technical assistance costs.
2. The highest ranking will be provided to the proposal that addresses the most significant wetland habitat resource concern and contributes the greatest level of technical assistance.

#### B. National Level Criteria

The review board will rank the State-submitted proposals based upon:

1. The level of technical assistance contribution, including the duration of the potential partnership arrangement;
2. The scope of the proposal, that is the amount of acres and projects that will be addressed;
3. The focus of the habitat restoration and management. Greater consideration will be provided to proposals that address at-risk species;
4. The NRCS State office's ability to perform the task in the absence of the partnership; and
5. Other considerations determined appropriate by the Chief, NRCS.

#### V. Application and Submission Information

##### A. Proposal Materials

Proposals must contain the information set forth below in order to receive consideration. Applicants should not assume prior knowledge on the part of NRCS as to the relative merits of the project described in the application. Applications must be submitted to the appropriate State Conservationist in the following format:

1. Project Abstract: Each proposal must contain a summary of not more than one page that provides the following:
  - a. Project title;
  - b. Project duration (beginning and ending dates);
  - c. Name, address, telephone, e-mail, and other contact information for the project director (please provide a mailing address, not a P.O. Box);
  - d. Names and affiliations of project collaborators;
  - e. Estimated number projects and acres to be addressed by the proposal;
  - f. Project objectives;
  - g. Summary of the work to be performed;
  - h. Total project cost;
  - i. Total Federal share of the total project; and
  - j. Total partner contribution in terms of financial and technical assistance.
2. Information required in III above.

#### B. Submission of Proposal

Proposals must include all required forms and narrative sections described in Section V, partA.; incomplete applications will not be considered. If submitting proposals for more than one project, submit a separate, complete application package for each project. Applications are to be typewritten on 8½” x 11” white paper, double spaced, and on one side only. The text of the proposal must be typewritten in a font no smaller than 12-point, with one-inch margins.

Applicants must submit one signed original and six complete copies of each project application.

Each copy of the proposal must be stapled securely in the upper left hand corner. Hard copies

must be accompanied by an electronic copy on a 3½-inch diskette or compact disc. Electronic files must be either Microsoft Word or Acrobat (PDF) files.

Proposals must be received at the previously aforementioned address by 5:00 p.m. EDT on June 30, 2005. If that date falls on a Saturday, Sunday, or a Federal holiday, applications will be accepted until the close of the next business day. A proposal's postmark date is not a factor in whether an application is received on time. The applicant assumes the risk of any delays in proposal delivery.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to submit completed applications via overnight mail or delivery service to ensure timely receipt by NRCS. Receipt of all applications will be acknowledged by e-mail. Therefore, applicants are strongly encouraged to provide accurate e-mail addresses. If the applicant's e-mail address is not indicated, NRCS will acknowledge receipt of the application by letter. If the applicant does not receive an acknowledgment within 60 days of the submission deadline, please contact the appropriate NRCS State office.

## VI. Proposal Review Information

### A. Proposal Review and Selection Process

Prior to proposal review, the NRCS State office will screen each application for completeness. Incomplete applications, including those that do not meet eligibility requirements, will be eliminated from competition, and notification of elimination will be e-mailed or mailed to the applicant.

Applications meeting the requirements of this notice will be scored by a Review Board against the Criteria for Proposal Evaluation identified above. Scored applications will be forwarded to the Chief, NRCS, along with a letter identifying the priority for selection. Proposals that have been selected will be notified by mail within 10 business days of the final

selection. Applicants whose proposals have not been selected will be notified within 15 business days of the final selection.

VII. Agreement

Upon notice of selection for WREP funding, the appropriate NRCS State Conservationist and selected partner will enter into a contribution agreement. The contribution agreement will identify the amount of WREP and partner funds obligated to the project, the project deliverables, the respective timeline and budget, and other related requirements.

Signed in Washington, D.C., on May 16, 2005

BRUCE I. KNIGHT

Vice President

Commodity Credit Corporation, and

Chief

Natural Resources Conservation Service

## Appendix

### Natural Resources Conservation Service State Conservationists

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Capitol Avenue, Little Rock, AR 72201-3228; phone: (501) 301-3100; fax:  
(501) 301-3194; [kalven.trice@ar.usda.gov](mailto:kalven.trice@ar.usda.gov)

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